Interview with Mr. Emilio Vanoni
Conducted by Dr. James L. Dodson
and Miss Paula Boyer
Conducted on December 8, 1976

TAPE #1 - SIDE 1 & 2

DODSON: And how long have you lived here in the valley Mr. Vanoni?

VANONI: Well, you might say all my life because I was born on the east side of Los Angeles, which is now the street there is Lyon and it's what is now immediately south of the Union Station and I was born in November 24, 1903 in Los Angeles.

DODSON: Has your father lived here sometime before that.

VANONI: My father came here in 1819, that is to Los Angeles.

DODSON: What business was he in when he first got here?

VANONI: Originally he was a winemaker with a French winery, I don't recall the name. And later he worked for the Guaskte people and then in 1900 he went to...he started farming in what is now very close to Saticoy, Oxnard.

DODSON: I see. Do you recall whom he bought the land from at that time?

VANONI: Up there or here?

DODSON: Up there, where he first began his farming.

VANONI: No, he leased. I don't recall the name of the people, the owner. But he went from Los Angeles to Ventura County and he was up there about three years and then he came back to Los Angeles and he never moved from there and eventually we came to the valley in 1914, we came to Van Nuys.

DODSON: I see. When he was farming what sort of product did he have on his farm? What did he produce.

VANONI: In the...are you talking about the valley?

DODSON: The Saticoy area.

VANONI: Oh, the Ventura County... In the early days, it was...he farmed just barley, grain...grain. He had 400 acres of grain land which was put into barley. And at that time, back in 1900, they were just converting from grain ranches to beans, you see.

BOYER: I've heard about bean ranches. They keep saying Burbank use to be a bunch of bean ranches. Is that true?

VANONI: You mean over here?

BOYER: Yeah.

VANONI: No.

BOYER: They say bean fields or whatever.

VANONI: There was nobody here.

BOYER: Oh, over here.

VANONI: Yeah, beginning in the Van Nuys area. As a matter of fact, I was a bean grower here in the valley for 15 years.

BOYER: Did it take long for there to convert from growing the grain to growing the beans?

VANONI: No. In the San Fernando Valley here, naturally, formerly, prior to 1915 or 14...you see what changed the valley was the aqueduct coming here. And to my estimation, that was the biggest transformation that we had. That the valley ever had, was getting the aqueduct water. Then general farming changed because it was all grain prior to that and livestock grazing.

Then after 1914 and 15 when the water came in, then that changed...everybody went into orchards.

BOYER: Because then they had the water, right?

VANONI: You had the irrigation, right. And prior to that if there were any orchard in the Toluca Lake/North Hollywood area, those orchards were under...you know they were just...they didn't have any irrigation at all. That's the same way with the Burbank area.

BOYER: So when you farmed grain...I mean like even down here in the valley, it use to be grain, right...that was because grain doesn't take any water?

VANONI: That's right. That's called dry farming.

BOYER: Dry farming.

VANONI: That's...you're at the mercy of the elements and you put it in and wait for the general rain fall and I've grown dry crop farming for years and I don't recall of a total loss, as a dry farmer. There had been years where I...maybe one or two years the total number of years that I did dry farming, there might have been one or two years that I would probably break even but never at a total loss.

DODSON: This is all very interesting to me. When I first began doing these interviews I was surprised to find out that the Lankershims had raised wheat in this part of the valley and of course, I don't associate that. Wheat raising with Southern California. But that was adapted as long as we were short on water.

VANONI: As long as there was general dry farming the valley consisted only of grazing and dry farming which was wheat, barley or oats.

BOYER: So if it wasn't for that water coming down over the aqueduct we wouldn't have all this green, right?

VANONI: Right. As I said before the water transformed the valley and of course after the water, it was...the transformation is people. I think those two elements are the biggest factors in the valley. And we've had our draughts, we've had our floods, we've had our earthquakes. So those, you can't...those are the elements we have to live with.

BOYER: That water came in but gee, when it came down that was the big event, wasn't it? But you were only like ten, but did your parents maybe take you over to see the water come out of the aqueduct?

VANONI: No, that was I think in 1913 when Bill Mulholland made the shortest speech he ever made in his life. He said, "Here's the water, take it." That's about all. This is what I read in the books, you know.

DODSON: Of course, that was more to the point than a lot of longer speeches.

VANONI: I think he was justified there rather than padding everyone on the back.

DODSON: Was this part of the valley then very sparsely populated before the water came in in the period up to 1913?

VANONI: I think as soon as the water came in, naturally there were some bigger developers that developed the Los Angeles Milling Company which it was known...the Los Angeles Milling and Land Company, I think it was...then when they started developing it into smaller tracks, into 20 acre tracks, 40 acre tracks, anything you wanted to buy. From 5 acres to 100. Then it went from general farming to orchards, vegetables, what have you.

DODSON: Did you ever meet any of the Lankershim family? There company was very much associated was this part of the valley.

VANONI: The only time that I ever had anything to do with the Lankershims was my father was an alpha grower on Fulton Avenue in what is now Sherman Oaks and years ago when I was a young boy I use to deliver hay...that is deliver hay loose or bale in the general area of North Hollywood, elsewhere in the valley and Jack Lankershim was one of our customers.

DODSON: I see, he was the grandson I think of the original Issac Lankershim. The son of Colonel J.B. Lankershim, is that they way you remember it?

VANONI: I don't think he was a grandson. If I'm not mistaken I think he was the son.

DODSON: Colonel J.B.? Well, he maybe he was commonly called Jack because his name was James, I think.

VANONI: James? Well, we knew him only as Jack. Jack Lankershim. Is this historically true or what?

DODSON: Well, there was still another Lankershim that was commonly called Jack, who was the son of Colonel J.B. but judging from the dates, it must be Colonel J.B. that you had contact with.

VANONI: No, no, not the original.

DODSON: The original Lankershim was named Issac.

VANONI: Yeah.

DODSON: The one who came out I think 1869 to the valley.

VANONI: '69?

DODSON: That would have been before your father even settled in the east Los Angeles area.

VANONI: If I'm not mistaken I think it was his son because it was a short while later, he died very young. I think he was only 65 when he passed away and, of course, that was a way back in the...if I can think correctly, if he was about 65 years old in 1935, so that would make him his son, you see.

BOYER: Yeah, it'd have to be.

VANONI: And he had a sister and if I recollect and they both were aires to the Lankershim Hotel in Los Angeles.

BOYER: Where else did you go on this delivery? How old were you? You take everything around? Was this...

VANONI: Oh, I teamed in 1917, 18 and 19 I use to follow...my father would have a team and load of hay and then I would have a load of hay, immediately behind him and we'd go over to the...what was called the Old Prince Dryers. The Prince family had an apricot drying place on Magnolia in Lankershim and then we'd drive there in order to weigh the hay. Then we'd drive old Lankershim, of course, yes it was called...I think it was called Lankershim Blvd. at that time in the early days, after it was paved they called it Lankershim Blvd. Then we would go over old Cahuenga Pass and go down to Cahuenga, finally we'd go through Cahuenga and make a left turn on Hollywood Blvd. and go east to Bronson Canyon and we'd deliver our hay back in the canyon, there was a dairy in there. And this was in 1917, 18, 19 and 20.

DODSON: That expression Bronson Canyon sounds strange. Where would that be at the present time?

VANONI: I think it was called Bronson Avenue now. Bronson Avenue dead ends in Bronson Canyon.

DODSON: I see. I'm not too familiar with that particular section.

VANONI: Yeah. I think it's maybe a mile and a half east of Cahuenga Blvd. it runs.

DODSON: Did you go to school here in the valley?

VANONI: Yes. I went to Van Nuys High School. I think we started there in 1915 and I went through the grades and graduated there in 1922. And some of my contemporaries I could recall there were the boys that are still around are Van McQuarter and Sam Greenberg and well off hand it's hard to recollect, you know...

DODSON: Do you remember the names of any of your teachers from that period?

VANONI: Oh yes. I remember Mrs. Hahn. She's still alive. She's lives over here I think it's on Wilson Drive over here in Hollywood on the valley side. And well, if I could have a little more time, I could remember a lot of them. As a matter of fact, Mrs. Hahn was the Economics and History teacher of mine from 1919 through to 1922 and then she taught my son way over in 1950.

BOYER: Good grief.

DODSON: Do you happen to remember her first name. We might be interested in contacting her. If you could find it in the telephone directory.

VANONI: No, no. I have her address and phone number. I'll have to...my wife will give it to you.

BOYER: That's really something. She taught you and your son then?

VANONI: Oh yeah.

DODSON: Was the Van Nuys High School located in a different place when you went to there than it is now?

VANONI: No, Van Nuys High School originally costs $100,000. It was a beautiful building and the students were very proud of it because our gang, that is our class, was one of the first or second classes that went in there. That is, what from the grades. In other words, when I was there they also taught the 7th and 8th grade in conjunction with the rest of the high school and we students were very proud of our building but sadly, years later earthquake damaged it and they had build a new one. I don't recall which earthquake it was. You know that damaged. Made it unsafe.

DODSON: Incidentally, we hear so much about vandalism at the present time. Was there any of that when you went to school? As deliberately marking up the school building or damaging the furniture or that sort of thing?

VANONI: No. The kids I ran around with...we were respected the law and we at that time we only had one policeman in Van Nuys. I mean I'm talking about the early '20s and just before the '20s and we in general, all the boys that I knew we had a good respect of the law. Except once in awhile we might steal a watermelon. Now, the fact is when they had a sign "Keep Out" on a watermelon patch, we respected that sign because in those days they were allowed to shoot buckshot at you. Now there is a total difference but that's the history I remember.

BOYER: Was there a lot of watermelon patches around?

VANONI: No there wasn't that many watermelon patches around but the kids knew where they were. And a watermelon patch to a youngster I think...there's two...I've never grown watermelons. I have domestically for our home but I have grown halloween pumpkins and I use to have a patch...oh, I've grown those things for 15-20 years. I use to have a 5 acre patch, a 10 acre patch. And the alluring thing for a youngster, I think are two things.

It's worse than an apple orchard. That is, a pumpkin patch and a watermelon patch.

DODSON: You just can't resist those.

VANONI: You can't. We growers, we knew that the kids would take them, but we never, we'd turn our backs on them because they'd only take one or two. And you speak of vandalism today. Now they come in with a pick-up truck and haul things away.

DODSON: And even worse, just destroying the thing without hauling it away.

VANONI: Right, right.

BOYER: Can you tell us some more about the school when you were at Van Nuys? What were some of the clothes that they wore? In fact, well first, tell what did you wear to school? What did everybody wear then? Was there anything that everybody seems like kids always seem to kind of dress the same. Did they then?

VANONI: No, I think, as I recollect in the grades, we weren't allowed to wear jeans. That is, the common what you call the Levi Straus and Lee's that the kids wear today. That was very, you know that was frowned on.

And we had to wear I recollect wearing I think we couldn't wear overalls or jeans. What they required was that you were better dressed and in corduroys or from that up, you see.

DODSON: You would feel that the fellows then were definitely better dressed than they our now in going to school?

VANONI: Well, I don't think these kids today our sloppy but we were...I think the difference was, yes, I'd say the appearance was a little neater.

BOYER: Or more formal.

VANONI: In our day the boys wore more dress shirts than they do today. Of course, now we were involved during the war during that economy which was you know during the first world war the economy changed so great that people were better dressed during the war and shortly after the war because of the great economy change in the wages and making money.

BOYER: It was good for the farmer too.

VANONI: Yeah, it was good for everybody. Prior to world war back in 1915 why you know the economy was a little

tighter and people had to go a little further on their clothes and what have you.

BOYER: Was there any slang or anything used in the schools of kids when they were 18, 19 and 20.

VANONI: Any what?

BOYER: Any slang?

VANONI: No, I don't recall. Well, the slang words they used then, there out today. I mean these young kids, they'll have a word for something which I don't really know what they're talking about as far as the slang concerned.

DODSON: It would be my feeling that the language was a little more restrained in those days than it is now. Do you feel that's true.

VANONI: Well, to an extent. Of course, they're more open today. I have a granddaughter that's eight years old and it amazing me how much she knows. Because as you say, when we were kids we were more restrained. We were taught to be seen and not heard.

BOYER: Well, now what about for fun? Now what did all the kids do besides the boys stealing a watermelon once in awhile? Were there dances and things?

VANONI: Oh yeah. We had dances in North Hollywood. We had...well just going to school was a tremendous fulfillment because in school we had all our friends and I think...you know I think there is a 30-35 years difference between me and my son. And maybe I was more outgoing than he was but I had more friends than I could shake a stick at in school. And it was wonderful. And it's the same way with a small town. I'd feel that I'd walk down Van Nuys Blvd. and I'd meet somebody and I knew everybody. Everybody had an "Hello" "What are you doing?" or you'd meet some of the growers, farmers in town. But all that's changed now. I go by a person and he doesn't know me and I don't know him.

DODSON: Yes, this is one of the things that I think we do lose by becoming larger in population. I notice this even at the college. It had 425 students when I went there and now it's 25,000. So we no longer no the name of every instructor and most of our students as we once did. So you see the same thing here. Paula asked you about clothing and what they wore and you answered it in terms of the boys...do you think there are many

changes in the girls' costume over what it was when you went to school?

VANONI: Well, according to my granddaughter I've learned that they've just shifted from the dresses to pants. And she told her grandmother the other day that the reason is the only time they wear dresses to school is when they have their pictures taken. Now this comes from a 1st grader, you see. Maybe you know whether that's true or not.

BOYER: Well, I've got pants on.

DODSON: Well, you notice Paula isn't exactly... No, I think that's true. That's a change which really has taken place fairly recently. Now, I would say that even as much as 10 years ago, all girls in our college wore dresses. It would be very uncommon to wear slacks or anything like that.

VANONI: Yeah, 10 years ago.

DODSON: Well now, we've been asking you about recreation and school and all that, can you tell us anything about the religious life in the valley?

VANONI: Well, I can't...I think I'm a little...I don't think I could tell you much about that but I can say that the churches, from my observation, were much more, there was much more attendance 35-40 years ago than there is today. Much more. Now whether, what is the downfall of this, I just couldn't go into.

DODSON: It use to be that in small towns on Sunday you'd always hear the church bells ringing. Was that true here in Van Nuys?

VANONI: Well, I tell you in the horse and buggy days, naturally if you drove into town during the church hour you would hear the bells peel. But I would go a step further than that. Now my remembrance of the small towns in the valley...say from going to Van Nuys, going to North Hollywood, going to Burbank, going to Glendale, going into Los Angeles...you'd meet these little villages. Now my recollection with the horse and buggy was not the church bell, it was the blacksmith's anvil. You could go 500 to 700 or 800 feet before you got to a little village if it had a blacksmith you could hear them just as plain, as you can like the old steam engine was on the...

DODSON: Now, of course, that's something that's disappeared completely in the valley. That's hard for us picture at all.

VANONI: That's gone. And it's a very pleasant memory.

BOYER: That's really something.

DODSON: It just hadn't occurred to me that the blacksmith hammering on his anvil would be a sound that would be commonly heard.

VANONI: Oh yes. Yes if you were around a small village when the blacksmith's working you could tell it within...well, it depends which way the wind's blowing, you could tell it within 700, 800 or 1,000 feet.

BOYER: Do you have any other early, early recognitions that you remember stuff like that. Do you remember anything else? When you were young?

VANONI: You mean pleasant memories. Oh yes, I remember the boys here in the valley. We didn't have a windmill but our neighbor did and he was about...oh, I'd say he was about 1,000 feet away, no less than that...700/800 feet north of us and they had a windmill and that windmill was a very dear friend of mine because the more the

wind would blow the more I could hear just a pleasant sound...the windmill.

BOYER: Were there a lot of windmills around the valley at that time?

VANONI: Originally, yeah that was the only domestic water that you could get because that was reasonable...was the windmill.

DODSON: Of course, from what I'm reading we may possibly be coming back to windmills if they undo the energy shortage.

VANONI: I think that would be a good thing.

BOYER: Do you remember the Santa Ana winds?

VANONI: Yes, they were much more...well, I wouldn't say they're any stronger but now we have so many barriers, the homes, wind breaks, a lot of trees. But in the early days the ranches use to plow early. Get the ground in condition in the fall and December and January if it was a dry year you'd have wind storms that were just terrific. If the wind storm was so great there would just be clouds of dust.

DODSON: That is what I was going to ask you, whether dust storms were a problem then?

VANONI: Yeah, I remember my mother. Every time a big dust storm would come up she'd go into tears because she didn't care for the wind. Personally, I never objected to the wind because I was a kid and grew up with the wind and I just associated the wind as a friend of mine. I still love the wind. Throughout we'd go motoring or go to Arizona. We'd go any part of the state and my wife hates the wind and I just, I don't know.

DODSON: We were mentioning these Santa Ana winds. We were never troubled by cyclones and that sort of thing in the valley, were we? Do you have any recollection of anything like that every happening?

VANONI: No, no cyclones. The wind...those Santa Anas use to blow down the signs and the store windows but it's diminishing more and more because...on a kind of the buildings. Of course, the north end of the valley has...they still have a problem up there with the wind because it is pretty strong.

DODSON: The principle problem I suppose were floods and earthquakes, weren't they, rather than wind storms?

VANONI: I think that is going to be still the great test of the valley is floods.

DODSON: Of course, we are told that now presumably there enough flood control channels and all that, that floods would be controlled. That they will never be a problem again. But that isn't your feeling that we still might get some?

VANONI: No, my feeling is this: I think our flood control system is built on the assumption of a 25, 30 or 40 year flood. When we get that flood that comes every 75 or 100 years, these flood control areas that we have won't help the situation whatever.

BOYER: Can you tell us something about the floods that you've seen in the valley?

VANONI: Well, in 1914 the Los Angeles River at the area of Fulton Avenue and Ventura Blvd. and what is now Riverside Drive in 1914 I remember the river being level and in 1914 I'm sure that I don't think...I think 90% of all bridges in the Los Angeles area were washed out. But of course today our bridges are...I'm talking about the old days and they were perhaps the majority of them were wooden bridges but today we have longer spans and I think we have better safety.

DODSON: Did any of your property or your father's property ever get injured in flood? Did you suffer any damage as a result of it?

VANONI: No, no. No, but I did have...at one time I had 20 acres of alfalfa on Magnolia in the Van Nuys area that was back in 1938, the Flood of '38 and it covered the entire field with two feet of mud.

DODSON: Is that right? That was the most severe one we've had in the 20th century, the '38 flood.

VANONI: No, I would say...to my recollection is the difference between the 1938 flood and 1914 was in 1914 the valley wasn't built up, it was still general farming and water moves very slowly and in 1938 we already had some channels, concrete channels and the valley was built up much more and that's why the difference...

DODSON: The amount of damage done...

VANONI: The damage in '38 was so much greater.

DODSON: Yes, I can see that.

VANONI: I mean the property values then were of the built up areas, see.

DODSON: Do you recall seeing the North Hollywood or Van Nuys business districts and whether they suffered much damage?

VANONI: No, Lankershim Blvd. the Van Nuys...I mean the Lankershim business district was in a good area. See Lankershim is divided by I think several washes and the Big Tijunga, Little Tijunga and then there's a wash that use to exist between Burbank and Lankershim, the two cities of Burbank and Lankershim. I can't recall the name of the wash that was east of Lankershim. See when the Tijunga goes on a rampage it breaks out in three places. It will break east, that is up in the Sun Valley, wherever it breaks it will come through east of North Hollywood and Lankershim. And then we have two west washes, the Little Tijunga and the Big Tijunga and that's the whole story...is wherever it breaks during the flood period up in the Sunland area where the Tijunga comes out then that will be the havoc.

DODSON: I see.

VANONI: In 1938 it broke in the...it came down, if I'm not mistaken, I think it came through the Little Tijunga which is west of the North Hollywood Park.

DODSON: We've been talking about floods. Do you think that the earthquake situation is as bad as the flood situation as a menace to the valley or it's not in the same class?

VANONI: No, the earthquakes are one thing that we can't get around or do anything about at the present time but I think...personally I think that eventually we're going to have more property damage on floods than earthquakes. This is my opinion.

BOYER: So, you say that the valley has had a record history of like every 75 years there's been a big flood.

VANONI: I think so. I think every 35 or 40 years we get a good...we get into a wet cycle and it's something you can't get away from. It is the history of California, you know.

BOYER: So that's worse to look forward to than the earthquake, right?

VANONI: Of course the flood, you know, it comes...it doesn't hit you like an earthquake, immediately but now I remember the Long Beach Earthquake and the Sylmar and the Santa Barbara one and the ones that have been close by and well you might say, they're both a menace, the

flood and the earthquake and I don't know what we can do about it.

DODSON: Has your property suffered any earthquake damage in any of these?

VANONI: I've had some store fronts, that is I've been lucky, just the window, you know, the glass having cracked or falling out. That's the only...although in this home I can show you earthquake damage.

DODSON: You didn't get it too bad on the Sylmar quake this far south, though did you?

VANONI: No, we got...there wasn't any chimneys falling or anything like that but there are cracks that are viable from the Sylmar deal.

DODSON: I've been surprised since I've been interviewing people to find out that some who were here in 1906 during the San Francisco Earthquake were able to feel it this far south. I think you were probably too young than to have.

VANONI: No, I was only 3 or 4 years old.

MOM: I don't have it anymore but it's in the phone book I'm sure.

VANONI: Your phone book?

MOM: No, the regular phone book if you know her first name.

VANONI: We'll look it up and then we'll mail it to her.

MOM: I'm going to run out there and I'll get the check and sign my name.

VANONI: Okay, you can tell them to come down here. Ann, if they don't like it you tell them to come here at noon tomorrow. I can't get 'em on the phone. Otherwise I could make the call but I had no idea that time has gone so fast.

DODSON: We've found that when we're doing this it does fly very fast. You really don't worry much about earthquakes then, as far as the valley is concerned.

VANONI: No, I think all Californians are...I mean if you live here in California for twenty years like, you know it's going to happen but you live with it. But people in frame houses, I think they're comparatively safe.

DODSON: Yes, I think the experience has been that a frame house is one of the safest things to be in.

VANONI: You might get hit a little on the head, shoulder or whatnot but I don't think it's terribly dangerous, you know.

BOYER: Since we've been asking people about the flu that came around in 1918 that they said was the original Swine Flu. Do you remember that or if any of your maybe classmates were sick?

VANONI: Oh yeah.

BOYER: Because especially since everybody's talking about it again right now in 1976.

VANONI: 1918 we were on the ranch here and my father during the flu epidemic he had business in Los Angeles but he wouldn't go...he or my mother wouldn't go in because he was afraid that...my mother and father were afraid that they'd contact it. Right on the tail end of the epidemic we had some business so he took me along, with the horse and buggy. And we went down and three days after we'd visited the city and came home I came down with it.

BOYER: Oh, you had it.

VANONI: I got it. But fortunately, my parents, it went through the family but it was light. It was light.

DODSON: Do you have any recollections of what the public reaction to it was? Was there panic over it?

VANONI: No, my recollection of the papers. It was headlines and in Los Angeles in the downtown area they were wearing masks, that is handkerchiefs over their nose. And they were watching it close but it was terrible because my father he lost two big strong tall nephews. They were big six foot men that were in their prime. They were 28-30 years old and they just caught it and died immediately. It seemed that it took the younger people...that they were affected...

BOYER: That's interesting because when I went and got a shot...I went and got a shot. I'm one of the few. But they told me that since at was in a certain age group, a younger age group that you needed boosters because you couldn't develop the anti-bodies against it as well as the older people could. I thought that was interesting. Maybe that's the same reason. Maybe it was tied in with the fact that you said it took younger people. Maybe they couldn't build up anti-bodies

against it. Because they said to get the Swine Flu shot, if you were anywhere in the younger age group, you should go get a booster to it because you wouldn't be...the vaccination wouldn't be as effective.

VANONI: I recollect that the younger...it seemed that the younger and stronger people were the ones that got it.

DODSON: How do you feel about it now? Are you getting one of those shots for yourself.

VANONI: No. Mrs. Vanoni...she went up and got a shot but I'm not worried or concerned. I mean I think we all seem to panic occasionally and I don't think it's...personally I'm just not alarmed a bit. If some city or if I happen to get it it'll be too bad. But I did get a booster in November though. I get one a year. Every year I get a flu shot but I didn't go back to the Swine, no.

BOYER: Well, you should have anti-bodies anyway.

DODSON: Yes, I was just wondering. I don't know but since you had it once, I'm wondering if you do have a certain degree of immunity now as a result of having...

VANONI: You mean all those years?

DODSON: That would be a question. Whether you would have any immunity that would be that lasting over such a period. I don't know if enough is known about it to know whether you do have any immunity or not.

VANONI: Well, we did...the wife and I went through what they call the Hong Kong Flu. Which was maybe 8 or 10 years ago. I don't recollect but that Hong Kong was the worse thing that I've ever had in the way of a fever and a cold. It was terrible.

DODSON: Since we're talking about disasters, what are your recollection of the Great Depression that began in 1929? Did that affect you and your family very much?

VANONI: No, you see we were growers. We had a cow. We had a garden. As a matter of fact, we as a family...we didn't suffer anymore than during prosperous times because we lived the same. The only difference was our income wasn't what it should be. But as far as living was concerned...because you see on the farm we had...there was nothing we didn't...

DODSON: Didn't product that you needed for food anyway.

VANONI: We had a garden. We had vegetables. We had a cow. We had milk; we had butter; we had cheese. We had

chickens; we had eggs. It was gruesome. When you look back at it, it was wonderful.

DODSON: I imagine you did suffer from the price of all of your products going way down, did you not?

VANONI: Right, this is what I say. Our living conditions were the same. We ate the same and practically lived the same but our income was...we had a tax problem. That's the problem we had. Was paying our taxes. But we weathered the storm. A lot of growers couldn't. A grower that was in debt, he just went under because he just couldn't make it. I remember during the depression I was just a young kid running around and I think...I might say that 90% of all the properties that I know of in the valley had a For Sale sign on them.

DODSON: Is that right? So the growers were pretty hard hit as a group in that way?

VANONI: Right.

DODSON: Of course, the strange thing about the present recession, is that we have prices going up even though we have unemployment and in 1929 it was the other way around, prices were low along with the recession.

VANONI: Well, this is the difference of this depression. This depression apparently the service of people has not gone down. The equity in your home has not gone down. In the great depression everything went down. The price of your home. The price of commodities. The only stability you had was the dollar. Now today, I don't know what we have.

DODSON: We have the usual rules of economics don't seem to apply to what's been happening in the last two or three years. As none of the things I learned in economics classes have come true as I have learned them.

VANONI: I don't know what the situation is as long as we have a stable dollar I think the answer will be that we will be alright.

DODSON: Of course, the dollar has been none too stable with the constant rise in crises which just means that the dollar is falling.

VANONI: That's true. This is why I say I don't understand this depression. The lower the dollar gets the more the price of your home goes up and it may be that I hope that the people don't panic and start buying wash tubs instead of putting their money in the bank.

DODSON: Do you remember how World War II effected the valley?

VANONI: World War II. Let's see now, I think that was the big transition. You see, we started to get our prosperity. Our prosperity came back then after the war, why I think there was 100,000 GI's that had their eyes on Los Angeles or part of the valley. And we had so many GI's. People come through the west coast and particularly Los Angeles and I think a great number of them said, "When I get out of the service I'm going to be established in California." And of course we got a great many of them in the valley.

DODSON: Was that then when the valley had a real real estate boom and began to fill up?

VANONI: Right, right. The valley boom since 1938 has never diminished. In other words, we've never had a depression of the kind that we had prior to World War II. We had a...since 1900 the valley had ups and downs. The prices of property, for instance, would fluctuate more than it had. Since 1938 we've had more stability due to the tremendous building. And our little cities are becoming larger and larger. Until today the valley is you might say is just solid.

DODSON: What would you say then has been the greatest change in the valley since you have lived here? Has it been this filling up with people?

VANONI: I think so. In my life time out here I would say that the two things that occurred...the greatest stimulus to the valley has been the bringing in of the aqueduct, which changed the valley into smaller farms, which brought people. And our little villages starting growing then and then the influx of people making it just a conglomeration of small towns. Those two items.

DODSON: One thing that we're frequently struck with is the comparison between crime now and say 30 or 40 years ago. There's much more crime in the valley. Are you conscious of that?

VANONI: I am. As I said before earlier, I think my generation...when we were kids our respect of the law and religion were two things that I think that has slipped with the younger people today.

DODSON: We read a lot about narcotics. Did any of your schoolmates ever use narcotics to your knowledge?

VANONI: No, we never...that was absolutely unheard of, you know. I mean if there was someone who drugs why that

was absolutely unheard of. Even a young lady smoking was practically nil.

DODSON: Did they go in for much beer drinking or anything like that?

VANONI: Oh, I think we had our, you know, you have that today. I think the extent there is practically the same. You know in the old days, young men liked their beer and they liked their hard liquor. But today the difference is...no, I would say when we were younger the divorce rate was much much less also than it is today.

DODSON: Would you say that there was a greater tendency to frown on divorced people and that that might have kept unhappily married couples together or do you think that there were more happy marriages?

VANONI: Well, that would be hard to say. No, I think today the young people...well as far as I'm concerned because you see I was brought up different. I was brought up with the thought that when you get married you stay married. And when I chose the girl that I'm married to now, I've been married to her for 42 years and that was my original intention. It was to get married and stay married. Now today I kind of frown on these

youngsters. They seem to think, "Well, if it doesn't work out, so what?"

DODSON: Now, one possible difference that you may have noticed is that today we have a lot of people living together who are not married. Was that at all common in the past?

VANONI: Not that I recall. Perhaps older and I would say...I don't think this living together in my time, people under thirty it was very very uncommon. Perhaps in certain professions. Like the...well, your theatrical people I think in those days probably went along on that but certain professions condoned it but as I remember...why...or maybe older people did. But it wasn't...you couldn't see it.

DODSON: You feel in these respects then there have been decided social changes in the attitude towards them now?

VANONI: Oh absolutely, absolutely. I think that the...I prefer the old way.

DODSON: So if you had your way about it, that little eight-year-old granddaughter of yours is going to be in the old way and not the new way.

VANONI: Well, I hope so. I can this...you know my...if I had a daughter and she chose to live with some fellow, that I can truly say that she is getting the short end of the stick.

DODSON: It would be interesting to know though, since you have been brought up one way, if that had happened would you disown your daughter?

VANONI: Assuming I had a daughter today?

DODSON: Yes.

VANONI: No, I don't think I would...I would certainly...I don't think I would condone it but I believe I would have to live with it because you ultimately you'd have two choices. You have a choice of saying, okay, you go live the man and you're going to lose the daughter. Or accepting it and still have your daughter. And if I had to go through with it I'd rather see my daughter occasionally than to be...than you know to lose her.

DODSON: Yes. Well, I was just curious to know since we have been talking about these changes whether you would adapt yourself to them even though they weren't common when you were young yourself.

VANONI: No, I've adapted myself to all these conditions. I see, you know after all, we all see what's going on. We don't condone it but I just say to myself, well you know, frankly I think that these kids living together are just...you know...you only have so many years in your youth. A man is twenty and a man is forty. There's a tremendous difference and if you waste your time living with two or three partners and when your forty years old you are going to awaken to a tremendous reality or shock. And for a woman or a girl, it's worse.

DODSON: Now, one of the things that has impressed as we have been interviewing people, would be this matter of the safety of streets. Over and over again we've been told by older people that no longer dare take a walk at night, although they use to feel safe doing it. How do you feel about that?

VANONI: Well, I don't let...I wouldn't...I don't...Mrs. Vanoni doesn't take walks at night for the simple reason of fear. Also, years ago I use to pick up...you know, driving I would pick up a transit or something. That I don't do anymore. And we have a lock on our gate which we lock it every night. And of course, our neighborhood so far has been excellent but I go along I think that the fear is much greater today than it was.

Incidentally, I think in the first 10 or 15 years of our marriage we never locked our back door. Never locked our back door. We got to go somewhere, we just go, close the door and that was it, you see. But then as things occurred little by little they become greater and naturally you have a little fear so you are a little more cautious.

DODSON: That again would be a change that has taken place in the valley.

VANONI: Right, right. Now this may be because we have say in San Fernando Valley we have a million people and naturally there's going to be a greater number of criminals and robberies and assaults than there would be if you only had say 5,000 people. I think in a smaller community there,s a...the smaller the community the tendency is less crime and robbery and assault and that sort of thing.

DODSON: That's probably true. When you were talking about horse and buggy I was interested in knowing how long would it take you go from... (I believe your telephone is ringing.)

(ANSWERS TELEPHONE)

TAPE #2 - SIDE 1 & 2

DODSON: ...from the valley over to Hollywood or to Los Angeles. The city let's say, the downtown section for that matter?

VANONI: I think it was 2 hours or 2-1/4 or something like that. We had a very good horse. My father...for buggy horses he'd buy what we called the old Indian Mustang. And he didn't look much like a fancy horse but boy did he have stamina. He was a...yeah, I would 2-1/2, I mean about 2 hours and 15 minutes to Los Angeles. That is the old at 1st and say the neighborhood of the old plaza district. That's where you parked your horse and buggy. Then you took the nickel streetcar and went about your business.

DODSON: Let's see, I don't think anyone else has given us an information on the time it took to travel by horse and buggy. So I'm glad to know that. When did you get your first automobile?

VANONI: In 1917.

DODSON: Do you recall what make it was?

VANONI: It was the old Buick 4 and the salesman that sold it to us was an old pioneer called Harry Beavis of Van Nuys.

DODSON: I've heard that name. He was in the real estate business later wasn't he?

VANONI: No, the Beavis family, there was two of them. The Beavis'...the real estate...Leaman Beavis were realtors but Mr. Beavis' nephew was called Harry Beavis and he passed away here in 1975. And Harry, when we got our car in 1917 I remember him coming to the high school in Van Nuys and picked me up to learn how to drive in the old Buick.

DODSON: Do you recall were there any particular type of driving hazards then that don't exist now? Was your engine more apt to stall on you to stick in mud holes and all that sort of thing?

VANONI: No, because the families in the early days when we first got cars we were very you know we were particular where we did go. And we seldom went off the pavement if we could help it. And they...the early day up till I'd say I'd say 1928 or '30, there was about a 10 year period that the cars weren't used very much for pleasure. They were strictly used for business and then later when the boulevard, that is when the

highways were more prevalent, why then people you know they went longer drives.

DODSON: That was in the days when you had to crank the motor when you first got one, wasn't it? Do you recall that?

VANONI: No, I don't recall cranking the old Buick. I think we had a battery. I'm not sure but I remember cranking plenty of Fords. Yeah, the old Model T and also the first tractors that we had we had to crank them.

DODSON: Wasn't there some hazard in that cranking. It seems to me I've heard stories about people getting a broken arm out of it or something in the cranking.

VANONI: No, but I have a dent on my forehead from a crank. That I got cranking a Ford. Of course, the cranks are suppose to stay in, you know. But some of them came out and you'd put them on the running board and so forth. But in general why...well the cranking days of course that was when we were young. The older people I imagine it was harder for them to crank a car.

DODSON: Do you recall anything about the price of cars at that time? The price of gasoline and oil?

VANONI: No, I remember...I think all smaller cars in the early days were under, they were under a $1,000. I think they ran from $750 to $100. As I recall I think my parents paid $1,000 for their first car, which was the Buick, the Buick 4. And it lasted us, it was in good shape when we got rid of it.

DODSON: Do you recall of anything about the price of gasoline in the '20s?

VANONI: In the '20s I think that if I recall the cheapest gasoline that I bought was for a number of years there I remember you could get 10 gallons for a dollar, that would be ten cents a gallon. Then they'd have gas wars...I think the gas wars sometimes they would only last maybe several weeks...but if I recollect the cheapest gas was about seven cents a gallon. Now this was prior to any state or federal tax on gasoline.

DODSON: Now, of course prices were very low in terms of our present prices but the wage level was very low too. Do you know anything or could you tell us anything about how the general wage level was? What a man might expect to make per hour in various professions, carpenters or plumbers or those people?

VANONI: Well, back in the early '20s I think a $5.00 a day wage for a wager was good wages. I know that carpenters were only getting $5.00 or $6.00 and you had to be a pretty good specialist in your line to get something like $75 or $100 a week, which was unusual back in say the early '20s. Of course, we had a boom after the first World War, building boom, real estate boom. And then of course the Great Depression came along.

DODSON: Well now, of course, at the present time both wages and prices are somewhat inflated. But do you feel that people are living better just the same that they're purchasing power is really greater in spite of the inflation?

VANONI: I think so. I think people with a good job.

DODSON: Can you tell us anything about any historic sites or buildings here in the valley that you think we should have a record of?

VANONI: Your question is sites that should be preserved?

DODSON: Yes. Or that people should know about it where important things happened. We know about the adobes that are still standing in the valley but we were

wondering if you think of something else where something important happened?

VANONI: Well, the sad part of the valley...it's like everywhere else, by the time we appropriate the money and get the enthusiasm to buy it, the package has grown so much smaller. Now say the case, there's one case that is very prominent in that...I would say the old Lopez home in...

DODSON: San Fernando? Yes.

VANONI: Yeah. What was the former governor? Was it Lopez?

BOYER: Pico.

VANONI: Pico. The Pico house near the San Fernando Mission. Okay, originally it was five acres with a lovely...I'm talking about say 20-25 years ago...in was five acres with a lemon grove. Well today, is it an historical place?

DODSON: I think it is, yes.

VANONI: Well today, it's dwindled to, we're fortunate if we have parking area.

BOYER: Yeah, that's pretty bad. It's back there behind a parking lot and everything.

VANONI: Incidentally, in the early '50s, you know I'm talking about the five acre lemon grove in the old Pico house, I believe a doctor owned it and I inquired, I was interested in buying it and the price was $38,000. And my wife and I we wish we would have bought it instead of coming here.

DODSON: Of course, we hear a lot of stories of what a person could have bought in the early days. But I imagine that many of people who came out here didn't have enough money to buy a lot of land even it was cheap. Because we hear so many stories of the low price of land but yet most people apparently didn't buy it and speculate in it.

VANONI: No, speculation wasn't here in the early days. In the early days, I'm talking about the horse era. You know a man could only do so much with a team of horses or four horses or six horses and if he had 40 acres or anything bigger than that it required help and more horses and people were generally content with, well they say with a 20 acre grove but after the...you know things were mechanized, tractors came in...why then there's a different story. But there is many parts of

the valley...I remember my father, we'd drive by these locations that were sandy or gravely or decomposed granite and he would say, "Well look that, what's it good for. It won't grow anything." So, you couldn't sell to...he couldn't sell it to anyone that was a grower because it had no value.

BOYER: I wouldn't to ask you also about the minorities in the valley. We've heard all kinds of stories about gypsies that use to come through some areas of the valley. And about Chinese encampments. Were there very many minorities in the valley when you were here, early?

VANONI: Did you say Chinese?

BOYER: No, no, I don't recall the Chinese being in the valley. We did have a few Chinese growers that grew you know they were ranchers and they were in business but of course we've always had the Spanish speaking group. Spanish or Mexicans, we always had them but we always, they were workers. We always got along with them. There wasn't any...I don't recall any minority business that we had against each other.

DODSON: So, there never were any real minority squabbles in the valley that had taken place in some other places?

VANONI: No, no we never had any labor problems with minorities or any other problems.

DODSON: Can you think of any interesting antidotes or stories that we haven't asked you about at all that would be interesting to the future if we recorded them?

VANONI: Well, I should have a few but off hand.

DODSON: I know that's a little difficult on the spur of the moment to think of something.

VANONI: No, I think it's been a wonderful experience. Occasionally we drive over into Nevada, Arizona and so forth and I see the pioneer spirit over there and also in the San Joaquin Valley every...or I go into a smaller village and it takes me back and actually this pioneer movement that I went through is continuing elsewhere in smaller towns in California and it's something that you have to accept or move away.

DODSON: Can you give us the names of any people that you think we might interview to get further information about the valley.

VANONI: Well, the only older friend that I have that is still with us is perhaps he's attended your meetings or is a member and that's Joseph Chase.

DODSON: Yes, we met Mr. Chase some time ago. I think we last spring went up to see him.

VANONI: Oh, well you see he was a neighbor.

DODSON: He owned a dairy, did he not? And then there was some big apartment complex that he built, was it not?

VANONI: Yes, he still has.

BOYER: Did you happen to know...you just said dairies and clicked in my mind, did you ever know who use to own the dairy that over there where our college is located? There use to be a dairy. What's the name of it?

VANONI: Oh yeah. He was Mr. Ciocca.

BOYER: Now what's that again. Spell it one more time, make sure I get it right.

VANONI: Henry Ciocca.

BOYER: That's the first time we've ever heard a name.

VANONI: I think there were two dairies down there.

BOYER: Were there?

VANONI: Oh yeah, there was one on...

MOM: I'm bringing in some coffee.

VANONI: Do you remember...how do you spell Ciocca? They want to know about the Henry Ciocca dairy.

MOM: Ciocca.

BOYER: Oh, that's not bad.

VANONI: Is that right.

(COFFEE TALK)

DODSON: Did you know Mr. Ciocca yourself?

VANONI: Oh yeah, yes. I done business with him as an alfalfa grower I use to sell the dairy. Oh, I've done business with a lot of old dairymen in the valley. A lot of old pioneers. You see, the trouble is they've been gone for so long it's hard for me to recall. Now, I knew as a youngster I knew the Bakeman family in North Hollywood. I knew the Weddington's the Freiberg's. Oh there's a great many of them that I...the Noble's the

Noble family and the old man that use to have the furniture store over here on Lankershim and Magnolia. He made a fortune...he bought just plain raw land where the Catasiac Lake is now and the government...I mean the state of California, the ? Mountain Water Company gave him a tremendous sum and then he went up north and bought more land. The old man is still around. I think he's about 86 or 87 years old.

DODSON: But he doesn't live here in the valley?

VANONI: No.

DODSON: Are any members of the Ciocca family still living in the valley to your knowledge?

VANONI: No, no. None of them are.

DODSON: I think our administration building rests on the place where the old dairy barn use to be and the silo.

VANONI: Right down on it.

DODSON: Do you remember that silo?

VANONI: Yeah, oh yeah. Now I want to tell you something. Where the present college is today. You know that

bottom... In 1914 I would say there was 8 feet of water there.

DODSON: Well, that's not the site that we wanted but we took it because we didn't want to fight with land holders in a different place and a lot of that is still ground.

VANONI: I think the college people know about it. I mean the architect knew about it. I think...now this is one of those deals that I was talking about formally. When we get a 100-year storm which is going to come just as sure as apples grow on trees...wherever that Big Tijunga breaks out up in the northerly area, wherever it's going to come downstream, why look out.

DODSON: Even now when we build a building, we frequently have to have a pile driver in there first because it's necessary to put piles in there to get a solid foundation for the building.

VANONI: One very interesting thing about the valley is if you go up into the Roscoe area where the dumps are, and you go to the bottom of one of those original dumps and you look at the strata, you can just as sure as I'm looking at you, tell the way the floods came and deposited those stratas.

DODSON: I don't know whether you know about it but our original choice for the college site was in the Woodman/Magnolia area but there were some valuable homes there and we found that it would create a great deal of opposition if we were to move into that site and that's why we took the area where the old dairy was because everybody was glad to see us come there and improve that part of the valley.

VANONI: That's right. I recall, I recall you wanted that...I think it was 60 or 80 acres between, well facing Magnolia and Woodman and for some reason, why the present site was much more reasonable and you got more land for the same amount of money.

DODSON: Well, I think the big problem was the movie producer, Raoul Walsh who had a home on the site we originally picked.

VANONI: No, it wasn't Raoul, it Mr. Wallace.

DODSON: Wallace? Well, I know that he said that we'd have to go to court if we wanted his land. He wasn't going to sell it otherwise.

VANONI: Hal Wallace.

DODSON: Hal Wallace, was he the one?

VANONI: See, I was on the opposite side of the college site in question. See, we're talking about the 40 acres, maybe it leads west of what we're talking about was my walnut grove.

BOYER: You know I'd like to hear more about how you moved in your ranches that you had and where you were. But also I think maybe we should have some coffee before it gets cold.

VANONI: You see, they owned 30 or 35 or 40 acres there. And your initial beginning was 60 acres. Your present site is what?

DODSON: We have about 105 acres in it now but originally there was more than that. We turned over some to the high school. It's probably a much larger area than we would have gotten in the other place.

BOYER: Just that we'll end up under 8 feet of water again, right?

VANONI: Well, it depends...you see in 1938 this wash was dry.

BOYER: Oh, I see it just depends which way the water comes down after it hits the wash.

VANONI: Sure. And the middle wash was the one that was doing the wrecking, yeah.

DODSON: The flooding?

BOYER: What I wanted to ask you...I wanted to know more about like the ranch you said you working on. Well, you had, right you had walnut groves and stuff. It would be interesting to me and I think the people in the future to know. What you did and how you farmed and what you farmed. And was that typical in the valley, etc. and what it was like.

VANONI: What I grew in particular. I was in the walnuts, English walnuts and I grew alfalfa. I grew oat hay and a few what we called then was Halloween pumpkins and I stayed mostly in...I wasn't in very much produce like lettuce or carrots, cabbages or those things. I was more in the...because then as now, you're geared up with your tools to work certain crops and...

BOYER: Specializing.

VANONI: Yeah, and that's what I grew.

BOYER: Were those typical crops for the valley here?

VANONI: Oh yes, that was the general...we had, in the early days of the fruit industry, Lankershim/North Hollywood area was peaches, plums, apricots and after the water came in why there were a lot of walnuts grown and the peaches and apricots. Those three were the main in the way of fruit.

BOYER: Where would you go when you'd sell your crops? Were there processing plants out here in the valley yet? Or no, you'd go into the Los Angeles.

VANONI: No, well we belonged to Friends of the Bean Association. We belonged to the association or you could be an individual grower. It was the same way with the walnuts. And we had a Walnut Grower Association. A Bean Grower Association but on alfalfa and general hay crops there wasn't any...you know that was individual.

BOYER: Oh I see.

DODSON: Were those crops sold mostly in Los Angeles or were they shipped east, the fruit crops.

VANONI: The fruit crops were processed...originally we had a very large cannery in Van Nuys and we also had one originally in North Hollywood and we had what we called the fruit dryers where they cut the apricot in half and put it on trays and dryers them. And I think they tried prunes the valley but they didn't do well, the prune.

BOYER: Where did most the people go that really liked to ranch here? Where did they end up going?

VANONI: The old pioneers?

BOYER: Yeah, of course, are they just gone or did their families carry on the traditions any of them in any other areas of the valley. Not the valley of course, but outside of here.

VANONI: Well, the younger...when the boom came to the valley so fast and suddenly people would sell out and go elsewhere. That is the young men, say the sons of the family would...a lot of our area people here in the Van Nuys area went up to in the Tracy area in Tracy, Los Banos area in northern California.

DODSON: Would they go into farming up there then?

VANONI: The same...a lot of our bean growers just merely transferred up there.

BOYER: Just wondered. They sold their land here because they could get such a good price.

VANONI: And as a matter of fact, I had thoughts of doing the same thing. You know of growing elsewhere and I have. Ten years ago I bought a nice grain ranch north of the Paso Robles area and through various things that happened, we sold it. But I loved it. It was a beautiful grain ranch and the reason I bought it, it reminded me of early San Fernando Valley.

DODSON: Your son then is not interested in this type of thing.

VANONI: Yes he is. Yes he is. I wouldn't be surprised if he goes back to growing grain or beans.

BOYER: That's something. What's one of our leading crops, do you know, for California or maybe southern California?

VANONI: The leading crop in this area?

BOYER: Yeah.

VANONI: What is left of the valley...there's quite a bit of citrus still going and I think there's back in some of the canyons we have quite a bit of flowers, you know, growing.

DODSON: The olive was important in the northern part of the valley, wasn't it?

VANONI: Right, back in the early days that Sylmar area. They had a big terrific cannery project there. But today there's various stands, corn stands around. They grow sweet corn but that's about all that's left is your sweet corn, flowers and the citrus.

DODSON: The olive wasn't grown in this part of the valley?

VANONI: No, no. I think it was a bigger concern because they had to have a processing plant and when they had a big crew to pick olives, naturally it was just a bigger...you know you can imagine someone having 10 acres of olives, what would you do with them. You couldn't get lots of help.

BOYER: That's a lot of olives.

VANONI: And then to process them you have to send it maybe up to Porterville or wherever there grown.

DODSON: I had wondered whether there was some climatic difference or soil difference that made the olive grow up there but we don't find it down here. But do think it was just the problem of processing them?

VANONI: Processing, yeah and harvesting. It was like our grape industry was started in southern California. It started...you had to have enough grapes to supply a winery but if you were an isolated grape grower, why you, it didn't pay.

DODSON: It didn't pay.

VANONI: But general farming. That's still going on all over the state which is wonderful I think. We're going to be faced with bigger prices as the years go by.

DODSON: One of the amazing things to me was to read that maybe 15 or 20 years ago the value of farm products in Los Angeles County was the highest for any one county in the United States. I think because of the fact that we raise citrus and other things which would have a considerable value. I'm wondering now I suppose that we're way down.

VANONI: Oh yes. You see when you go back years ago, Los Angeles County I think was the largest producer of

agricultural products of any county in the United States. And that was due to the citrus, the dairy industry, the general farming, the poultry industry and now L.A. county is so filled with people and homes that we don't have a citrus industry. They don't...the chicken farmers are out. The dairymen is practically out and so there, we're just faced homes, homes and...

BOYER: Now it's a business community. Yeah, still.

VANONI: Right. And I think number one now is either Fresno County or Kern County.

DODSON: They were raising quite a bit of cotton up there I understand.

VANONI: And Fresno and Kern, they have everything, everything. General farming, produce, dairy, you name it, they have it. Cotton, which is king in San Joaquin Valley. I remember as a boy when they first experimental cotton in Imperial Valley.

DODSON: Did they ever try raising any of that here in the San Fernando?

VANONI: No, no, we were getting along with our beans and walnut groves and other fruit trees.

DODSON: Well I imagine those things...

BOYER: I guess why there is still ranches and things out here was of course the movie industry. Do you remember the movie industry when it came out to the valley or anything about it. Did they ever film on location around here?

VANONI: Well, all I remember about the movie industry was of course, we had Universal which I believe Carl Lumley's family or Carl Lumley bought it, originated it in 1914, that was Universal City and then during the '40s they opened up Studio City. What helped the valley in the early days was the prestige of the movie people coming out here and living in the Encino area, Northridge, wherever they bought a nice farm, they would build a nice home and this naturally was one of the enhancements that drew more people you see.

DODSON: Did you know any of the early actors or actresses yourself?

VANONI: We knew Mrs. Wallace and I remember years ago meeting Clark Gable at a horse ranch and I met him in Encino I met Paul Newman ? and well to me you see I mean Hollywood has been Hollywood all my life and these people never...

BOYER: I've never heard that before but that's true that they did move out here and helped the valley.

VANONI: Oh we had lots of people out here, I mean lots of motion picture people. They came out here to get away from the night life and to raise their family, you see, which was a smart thing to do. And in the meantime their properties enhanced and they made money and of course, that was one of the things that drew...if you went down the street and bought 20 acres or 5 acres and your realtor would say, "Well, up on the corner so-and-so has a 40 acre home and ranch," why this is certainly an inducement for you to buy.

BOYER: That's true.

VANONI: Of course it is.

DODSON: I suppose another important industry that came into to the valley was the aircraft with Lockheed, was it not?

VANONI: That's right, that's right. One of the original 40 acres...I can't think of the name of the cross street, on Saticoy. I had a 40 acre bean project there, where Lockheed is now. Woodley, a 40 acre corner of Woodley and Saticoy prior to Lockheed buying it. And then I

think the airport...there was an airport up there before Lockheed moved in.

DODSON: There was one in Glendale that was called the Grand Central Airport for a while, do you remember that?

VANONI: I remember the Grand Central when, I don't recall the man's name, but he was trying to build an air ship there. And the air ship was in full view for, oh quite a number of years, at the Grand Central. And this air ship attracted many many tourists that would come out to Grand Central to see the big cigars that they called...

DODSON: And then the most important airport in the valley became the Lockheed Airport, didn't it?

VANONI: Yes.

DODSON: The Grand Central was finally sold for a manufacturing park or something like that.

VANONI: Right, the Grand Central became an industrial park and then Lockheed kept growing.

DODSON: How do you feel about the present situation of the Hollywood/Burbank Airport? Do you think it should become an industrial park or remain an airport?

VANONI: No, no, I think it should be...I really think the City of Glendale, the City of Burbank, San Fernando, if they can swing the deal and keep it as is that it will become very very useful because it's close in and I know many people in Pasadena that say, "I certainly wish I could just drive to Lockheed and go to San Francisco instead of driving to International." And it's the same way with me. I think it's going to be beneficial in the long run. Because they're going to take the sound...as soon as the sound is eliminated from the jets, why I don't think that we're going to have a problem with the Lockheed Airport.

DODSON: Of course, it's that sound that causes some people to object. I don't seem to have any other type of objection to it. You're not bothered here by being in the flight pattern, are you?

VANONI: Occasionally we are. Occasionally I'm on the telephone and I really have to wait till that thing buzzes by because it depends with your...unless it's the...if it's the pattern or wind or the short turns, I don't know what it is but it doesn't bother me.

DODSON: How do you feel about this business of having the valley secede from Los Angeles? Do you hear some agitation on that, I believe Senator Robbins is in favor of it and some others. Do you feel that would be beneficial to the valley?

VANONI: No, I don't think...in the long run we might save money tax-wise. But I wouldn't be for it. For instance, this canyon, what is it up there?

BOYER: Canyon country.

VANONI: Canyon country seceding, I think it's wrong. I think if we get any tax reform in the whole county that these will be eliminated.

DODSON: I think it probably is the tax question more than anything else that causing it to be questioned.

VANONI: And then there's lots of ambitious would-be politicians who want certain jobs, that this is why that my estimation is to why they're pushing it.

DODSON: I suppose there are probably some people who have small children that might object to the busing too. The question of busing children to another part of the city

to go to school. I don't know how prevalent that is in the valley, whether much of it's being done or not.

VANONI: I think we're going to have to correct that too, the busing. I don't think that's going to solve the problem because we have...there's quite a bit of dissention on busing and they are going to have to come up with... My view of busing is, okay, if you have the privilege right of sending...if you did have the privilege say I didn't care to bus or send my child to Van Nuys High School but I preferred San Fernando. Okay, if I felt that way then I should assume the transportation charges to bus my child or student to San Fernando, not presume that the city has to bus my child wherever they feel like it, see.

BOYER: That's a very interesting point. I don't see that brought up very often.

VANONI: In other words, if you don't care for a certain district, right, you should have the privilege of saying, "Well, I'm going to send my child to Burbank." But then the Board of Education is to say, "Okay, if that's the way you feel about it, we'll give you the privilege of sending your child and enroll over in Burbank, but the transportation is your business."

BOYER: I got to get him here. That's an interesting fact. They should pay for it.

VANONI: And if this is your privilege and you don't think Van Nuys is good enough for your child, well then you should pay for his transportation back and forth or wherever you like.

DODSON: So you don't feel that busing is really answer to any of these problems?

VANONI: No, I don't think. Because in my talk with people there's a lot of people that feel that they'll move in a certain area because they want their child to go to this school. And then they wake up and find out that he's bused across town. And this is not the answer. Because these people will move away or they'll agitate and that isn't the answer.

BOYER: That's true, I agree with that.

DODSON: Paula, do you have any other questions?

BOYER: Well, I was just going to say...I wanted to know one of our questions here. What is this...about whether there is anything that's happened in the valley history that you feel, you know do you feel sad about anything

that's maybe passed out of the valley? Or do you feel good about anything particularly that's happened to the valley?

VANONI: Well, as I said before...I've become use to this progress business and gone along with it. From a young man in the horse and buggy days to where I'm living comfortably and although did...I can assure you that it wasn't easy. And I think all of our young people today if they take the same attitude and work as hard as I did, they'll accomplish the same thing.

BOYER: But, well you've seen quite a bit of the valley. I mean you've seen it from like you said the horse and buggy days up to till now when we are deciding whether or not the jet airlines could take off at Lockheed. It's been very ideal it seems like.

VANONI: No, I think our airports are essential and when the noise factor is eliminated why we're...they'll be alright.

DODSON: But as of now, you're willing to put up with the amount of noise you get at least to keep the airport?

VANONI: Well, you take the people immediately in the, you know adjacent to any airport, they have their grips but I

think after all when they moved in there, I think their eyes were open.

BOYER: That's true.

VANONI: You know. It's just like...there's a lot of agitation down at the International Airport that naturally an association will form and blame the airport but who was there first?

DODSON: That's a very important point. Of course, if you settle right next to an airport you should be willing to accept the amount of noise you're going to get.

VANONI: Right, you're putting...you might say you're putting your dollars where the noise is and this is something that was there when you entered the picture.

DODSON: And of course if all the airports are put in very distant places, then they'd lose their value.

VANONI: Right, right. The closer the airport I think that all you got to do is go down and take a ride somewhere and you find out that for instance if you go to International from where I live here, it takes longer to go to International than it does to take a ride to San Francisco.

DODSON: Yes, I think I became aware of that. I'm originally from Colorado and I think it takes me longer to get from La Cresenta to the airport than the airport to Denver.

VANONI: Well, Denver is a very nice town. 5,000 feet high. A little cold though.

DODSON: Yes, that's one reason I came to southern California. That my have influenced your family I imagine. Do you have any recollections of why they happened to come here originally.

VANONI: No, my people and my wife's people are from northern Italy and Italy you might say, with the 48/50,000,000 people is an exporter of people and that's about all they can export because they don't have...they are not generous with other resources.

DODSON: That's true. Italy doesn't have much in the way of natural resources. That has, of course, hurt the economy of the country.

VANONI: Now, the people in my parents' village, they either went to Argentina and they came to California.

DODSON: Would you say that they came to California because the climate was more like that of Italy than most other parts of the United States? Did that have anything to do with it do you think?

VANONI: No. The climate here is much more, it's warmer. The California area is much warmer. I'm talking about, not the mountains, but the valleys, the sea coast and so forth. And you see our village people, they were growers. They knew how to grow things and for instance my father when he came here he didn't have enough money but over a period of years he saved his money to go into growing ?, ranching.

DODSON: Well, we usually say that southern California has the Mediterranean climate, which is the same as many parts of Italy and so I wondered if that had influenced him in coming here because he felt the climate would be somewhat the same. Of course, if he were from northern Italy it's possible that climates there would be a little more severe than in southern California.

VANONI: It is in our village we were in the Alps.

DODSON: Well that would be quite a bit different, the Alps.

VANONI: Yes. And there winters are, I wouldn't say severe, but they are cold. They're very cold. I think in all villages in foreign countries, the trend is in the village they hear of a young man or some person making it in a certain part of the world. So then if he has friends, his friends go and the first thing you know you have a certain sect that came from a certain village and that's the way my parents were. They followed the trend where their friends came. Their friends came to L.A., Los Angeles and so that's the way it should be.

BOYER: And they came too.

VANONI: Now I've noticed, for instance, on our Pacific coast going north up in the Salinas area, King City over in the Santa Maria area and the Italians that you encounter in those areas, the old pioneers, it was the same trend. They came from villages where their friends...you see.

DODSON: That's interesting. I hadn't heard that before, it makes sense.

BOYER: Yeah, you come where you knew.

VANONI: And some of my people went to Argentina. And there is a large colony of Italians in...Buenos Aires.

DODSON: I think there are really more persons of Italian and German descent in Argentina than there are of Spanish descent. I think I've heard that.

VANONI: That's right but the language is Spanish.

DODSON: Is Spanish?

VANONI: Yeah, Portuguese/Spanish. But for instance my wife is related to...do you remember Dr. Illiad that was President of Argentina?

DODSON: I don't know the name. No, I don't my Argentine history very well.

VANONI: Well, he was President four or five years. The Illiad family, they were in our village.

BOYER: And those are some of the ones that went down to Argentina.

VANONI: And my wife and I were over there eight or ten years ago. My golly, time goes by so fast, that's when President Illiad was president. His people's home was

right next door to my wife's people. And my over the door ? to my wife's people it's engraved over the door the date is 1492.

DODSON: Is that right? Have you kept any connections with your relatives in Italy at all or ? completely?

VANONI: No, I'm the only son of an only son.

DODSON: Is that right?

VANONI: For instance, my father came here with a man called Robert Vanoni of Ventura County. He came here in the early '90s and he was a very good friend. They were both very good friends. And the clan, my father's clan existing today is only I and my son and my granddaughter. And the Vanoni's in Ventura County, there's about 90 of them.

DODSON: Well, maybe your son will have some more children.

VANONI: I don't know. It's funny, that's the way it's goes.

DODSON: Well Mr. Vanoni, we certainly appreciate all the time you've given us.

VANONI: There's one more thing I want to say for an historic fact. And I think this is the greatest thing that I can remember about my father. My father went to Ventura County in the Saticoy area and the first year that he farmed it was...he had a draught. He planted 400 acres of grain and he lost his shirt. He couldn't harvest. So he didn't know what to do so he found out that he could get his job back in Los Angeles so it circulated among the neighbors that Mr. Vanoni was going back to Los Angeles. Well at that time we had a young banker coming into his own. His name was A. Levy. And one morning Mr. Levy drove him to the yard and he said, "Hey Vanoni, I hear you're going to leave us." And my father said, "Well, what else can I do?" And Mr. Levy, "Well, I'll tell you what you do." And he out of his coat he drew a long slender little book or ledger, whatever you want to call it. And he said, "Look, I'm going to help you. So whenever you need seed, it's on this page, you go to the S.P. Milling Company. Whenever you need clothes, you go to...on the next page was Leman Bros. of Oxnard. Whenever you need blacksmith work, you go..." And there was three or four pages that Mr. Levy had signed on and so my mother and father went through that fall and that winter without ever seeing a nickel. All they had was this little book. Whenever they needed anything they'd go into Oxnard and buy it and it was entered on the book.

And he planted his crop and low and behold he had a beautiful crop the following year. The first thing he did he went down and took of Mr. Levy.

DODSON: Is that Bank of A. Levy still in existence.

BOYER: Oh, it's a big bank, the bank.

VANONI: That's the one.

DODSON: Is that right. Well, that is a very interesting story.

VANONI: And my father told Mr. Levy he said, "Well, why do you trust me? I don't have a dime to fight, if we have another draught, what's going to happen. You won't..." Mr. Levy just told him to just don't worry about it. But character loans were prevalent then you see. And Mr. Levy was a very sharp-eyed business man and if I recollect my father only had to pay 10%, which Mr. Levy could have assessed him, I believe that the laws are 12.

DODSON: Is that right. We also had an Italian banker in San Francisco who was willing to help out the farmers.

VANONI: That's right.

DODSON: The J. Levi's.

VANONI: I've never met him. I've seen him but I've never met him.

DODSON: Well that's how he got started, wasn't it, making loans to the farmers?

VANONI: The produce men around San Francisco, I mean San Jose. He was sharp-eyed... In other words, these men knew who they're dealing with you see. The old system of character loaning. But today, why that's out. You can, they'll stretch it a little but not like that.

DODSON: Did you ever know Mr. Levy yourself.

VANONI: No, I'd never met him. He had a...his son took over you know. Incidentally, off the record...

DODSON: You were telling us about the equities held by banks.

VANONI: No, in the Great Depression...for instance if you had an equity of only...say you had a home of $3,500 that was worth $3,500 and you had $1,000 equity in it you see and you still owed $2,500 you could move across the street and buy that one much cheaper. You could probably save $1,500 by buying the one across the

street than staying in your own home because the equity had fallen so...the equities were diminished you see. And a lot of people did that. They just walked away from homes and went elsewhere and bought the same home at $1,500/$2,000 cheaper or ?

DODSON: Were there any panicky runs on our banks here in the valley during the depression, do you remember anything like that? Did any of them go broke?

VANONI: No, during the depression I don't recall any banks going bankrupt but there were several Building and Loans that... I think there were more than several because I know many years after the depression people did not trust the Building and Loans until the government authorized the safety factor.

BOYER: ...went down.

DODSON: The deposit insurance?

VANONI: Deposit insurance started at $5,000 and then increased to $5,000/$10,000 whatever it is today.

DODSON: It's up to $40,000 now.

VANONI: Right, $40,000. If that insurance wasn't there I don't think the people would...they certainly...the Building and Loan certainly wouldn't...for instance, our state banks, there's a few of them went under back in the middle west and they're not federally, the FISC is not, they're not in the...

DODSON: Insurance program.

VANONI: ...the insurance program.

DODSON: Well can you think of anything else that you would like to tell us? We are very grateful for getting the story about Mr. Levy.

VANONI: Well, bless his soul because I know my father would have...it would have set him back...I know, he always said so, "It would have set me back 10 or 12 years."

BOYER: Sure, to come out of that. Wow.

VANONI: Yeah, to come out of it. You think, here he was broke. To have to go back on his job and still ? to get into business for himself. And this is very impressive to me. And I hope the Levy and Company gets bigger and bigger.

DODSON: Where is that bank located here in the valley?

VANONI: There's one here at...I think the Bank of A. Levy, we have one at Saticoy and Balboa. I don't know if there's any out in the west end or not. I know there's one up in Thousand Oaks.

DODSON: Was it originally a bank established in Ventura County and then spread to Los Angeles.

VANONI: No, I don't think it's in the Los Angeles areas. It's mostly in Ventura county. The Bank of A. Levy. As I was saying a moment ago he had a son but I think the son passed away in his early 60's and incidentally the old man was only 65 when he passed away.

DODSON: I wondering if there are any direct descendants of the family then living in Ventura if not down here.

VANONI: I don't know. I wouldn't be surprised if there are. I know you probably...I figured we would go back to that Wesley article that tells something about his family.

DODSON: I see. Well, we certainly appreciate what you've done for us, Mr. Vanoni.

VANONI: I don't if I...you'll probably get a lot of repetition from the same guys.

DODSON: No, we get some new things from nearly every person we interview. Everything is a little different and that's one of the things that...

VANONI: And believe me I haven't stretched things because I don't believe in that.

DODSON: No, I'm sure you haven't. Well thank you very much.

DODSON: You have been listening to an interview with Mr. Emilio Vanoni. The interview was conducted by Dr. James L. Dodson, Curator of the Los Angeles Valley College Historical Museum and by Miss Paula Boyer, Deputy to Dr. Dodson. The date is December 8, 1976. The interview was conducted at the home of Mr. Vanoni, 13728 Chandler, Van Nuys.

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